

Women's Department.

A DISCUSSION BY SOROSIS.

Marion Harland and Other Bright Women Discuss the Pros and Cons of City Life.

At a New Year's party presented to Sorosis recently by one of the Club the following question was argued:

Believed that modern city life is unfavorable to the formation of true homes, and does not elevate the character of either men or women.

In presenting the question Mrs. Thomas said: "The argument is not intended simply to institute a comparison of the advantages of city or country life. God made the country and man made the town. Yes, and he didn't waste much time about it either. Having made the town, man as a rule clings to it. He loves such crowds as we have here in New York, and failing this, he makes an effort to content himself in small and quiet places like Chicago or St. Louis. The homes of our nation are the foundation stones upon which it rests. It is within the province of our question to look into the conditions under which they are formed in cities, where men mostly congregate, and to touch on any point which involves their construction, their proper maintenance, and the customs formed and fostered by them."

Mrs. Turbome (Marion Harland) opened the discussion with one of her characteristic papers. "We admit at the outset," she said, "that conditions of a artificial civilization may obtain as arbitrarily in rural as in urban districts. Fashion in a village is as despotic in unreason as fashion in the metropolis. Nor do we deny that the steadfast soul carries with it everywhere its own atmosphere and possesses in a just sense of a catholicon against moral malaria. I am too busy a woman as well as too domestic to yield to the drift of the glittering stream of society; but I am not out of hearing of the wash of the sacred tide, ceaseless as the mean of the still-voiced Berothothe. The engagements of a devotee of society would tax the endurance of a Hercules. Many of our best people receive even on Sunday, I am told, it is so domestic, for the husbands and sons can be at home."

"Where are they on week days?" I asked. "Why—not, where everybody else is. 'Children's balls' are up until the small hours when infants to costly fancy dress encouraged to eat indigestible food, lips, fashionable small talk, and waltz in hot rooms until brains and hearts are heated by premature follies and passions, ought to be prohibited by the S. P. C. C."

The belated society robe the cradle and the grave. A baby in full dress is well nigh as pitiful a spectacle as a grandmother ronged and decolored, and both barbare exhibitions are distressingly familiar to people who still maintain homes in which they live.

"I know of no organization of immortal men and women in civilized lands except the fashionists that aims at absolutely nothing and 'get there every time.'

"Our American citizen is the hardest run business machine upon the globe. A home of the right sort represents to him the dry dock into which the battered hull puts for repairs. When he endows his reluctant personality with evening raiment and trains his jaded visage into a society grimace, he comes nearer death than his spouse will ever suspect.

When he strikes evening functions, but insists that his wife shall attend, there is always the club where other evicted citizens congregate and are consulted.

"A darker chapter treats of the burdens borne upon the breadwinner of the household when the appearance of wealth and fashion must be kept up on inadequate means. What shall we do against an affliction that foregoes the comforts and judicious expenditure of a moderate income would afford, that spurns the holy quiet of domestic joys that neglects the culture of heart and soul to seem rich? This is it that crowds our counting rooms with bankrupts, our prisons with defaulters, and turns our places of fashionable resort into a caravansary of foreign courts, foreign manners, and foreign vices. It is not a matter for marvel that in just retaliations there should overtake us every half decade a panic-earthquake to shake us to our senses."

Mrs. A. M. Palmer, in supporting the notice, pronounced the conditions of modern country life as less idyllic than had been pictured in song and story. She spoke of the tendency of country boys of talent to gravitate toward the great cities, leaving the villages to the possession of the idle and uncultured, and the few means of cultivation available in small towns, of the idle gossip which furnishes the topics of conversation, of the time wasted in "neighboring," and the deplorable lack of worthy impetus to ambition in young men and women as compared with the advantages of the city in its libraries and galleries, its educational opportunities, and contact with brilliant minds.

"The city woman, like her home," she added, "is too often misundertood and misrepresented. She is spoken of as a trifler, given over to dress and dissipation. Yet there are busy workers among them, careful guardians of their children, faithful dispensers of charity, steady workers for the advancement of humanity, giving liberally of the good things spiritual and mental which home life has given to them, the light and centre of homes. It has been a bad to scoff at the fashionable city woman and paint her as oblivious to home duties. Yet many a leader in society goes to the ball with the kisses of her bairns warm on her lips, and spends her evening hours with her children. These women do not misundertake their work upon the world, but their watchful love guards every avenue where evil might enter, and cherishes every impulse for good in their children, in whom are cultured self-sacrifice and benevolence, generosity

and tenderness, all the virtues that are fostered only in homes where mother love rules."

Mrs. Merrill in support of the negative said: "There is the first clause of our question the qualifying word 'modern,' indicating that life in the city to-day is different from that of days past. Twenty years ago all women in New York were busied only in affairs of home and society. To-day the business and professional women number 20,000. Clubs and societies include almost as great a number. Thus a force nearly 40,000 have entered into the life of the city; 40,000 women can revolutionize almost anything. Is woman any less gentle and womanly, less sympathetic and companionable in the home because she has looked beyond the boundaries set off by conventionality? One argument advanced against city life is the lack of time. We have all the time there is, and women of affairs learn more in a week than women of the country learn in a month. It isn't the amount of time you have. It is what you do with it. Men in the penitentiary have time. That is their great grievance against the world. The human soul finds what it seeks always. Water will drown you, fire burn you, learning make you mad. So will city life degrade you, if you let it; but it can help you to make your home all that you will have it, a place where your highest possibilities may be realized, where your sons and daughters grow up to be strong men and women, and learn to be good fathers and mothers. Maternity is an instinct—paternity is an education. Modern city life is what it is because of the all pervading influence of women. Then it must favor the formation of houses and the elevation of all who want to be elevated."

"Except for the home," said Mrs. Ostram, "we would have no country, no grand America, no smaller, but good, England. In the formation of the home you can't get outside the idea of the men and women who make the home. In the home are bred all the virtues—honesty, piety, forbearance, unselfishness, and the like. The great Mr. Blanks are like sponges. They are sodden with moisture which they receive from every source, and are reduced to a pulp and water-spoons. This mixture of all the rains of all the heavens, when squeezed out by their several proprietors, drop by drop, is called their policy. Surely an eminent, a truly eminent, politician is the most wonderful work of man. All the Year Round."

The Matter of Car Fares.

Speaking of embarrassment in the matter of car fares when a male friend going the same way as yourself is encountered en route to bridge or ferry, a woman says: "I wish there was an inviolate rule, as there is among Englishmen. I remember soon after my arrival in England happening to meet a friend, to whose house I was bound at the moment by appointment with his wife. He was a resolute and distant man, though scrupulously courteous, and I wondered whether I ought or ought not to pay my fare through the three changes of transportation we must make to reach our destination."

"All debts are easily removed by the cause himself, who leaned over, after finding his own coin, over the inquiry, 'Got your tuppence ready?'

"We know our furnace-heated houses kill our plants and flowers and I wonder whether I ought or ought not to pay my fare through the three changes of transportation we must make to reach our destination."

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